



STAFF REPORT

MORGAN COUNTY PLANNING COMMISSION

PETITION FOR: CONDITIONAL USE

Property location:	1430 Durden Road, Rutledge, GA 30663
Property tax parcel:	022-062C & 022-064
Acreage:	12.5 acres
Applicant:	G. Wesley Holt, 1430 Durden Road, Rutledge, GA 30663
Applicant's Agent:	N/A
Property Owner:	G. Wesley Holt, 1430 Durden Road, Rutledge, GA 30663
Existing Use:	Farm, Event Facility
Proposed Use:	Farm, Event Facility, Farmstay

Summary

G. Wesley Holt has requested a conditional use for a Farmstay at 1430 Durden Road, known as Sunflower Farm, outside of Rutledge. Please note that Mr. Holt is a member of the Morgan County Planning Commission.

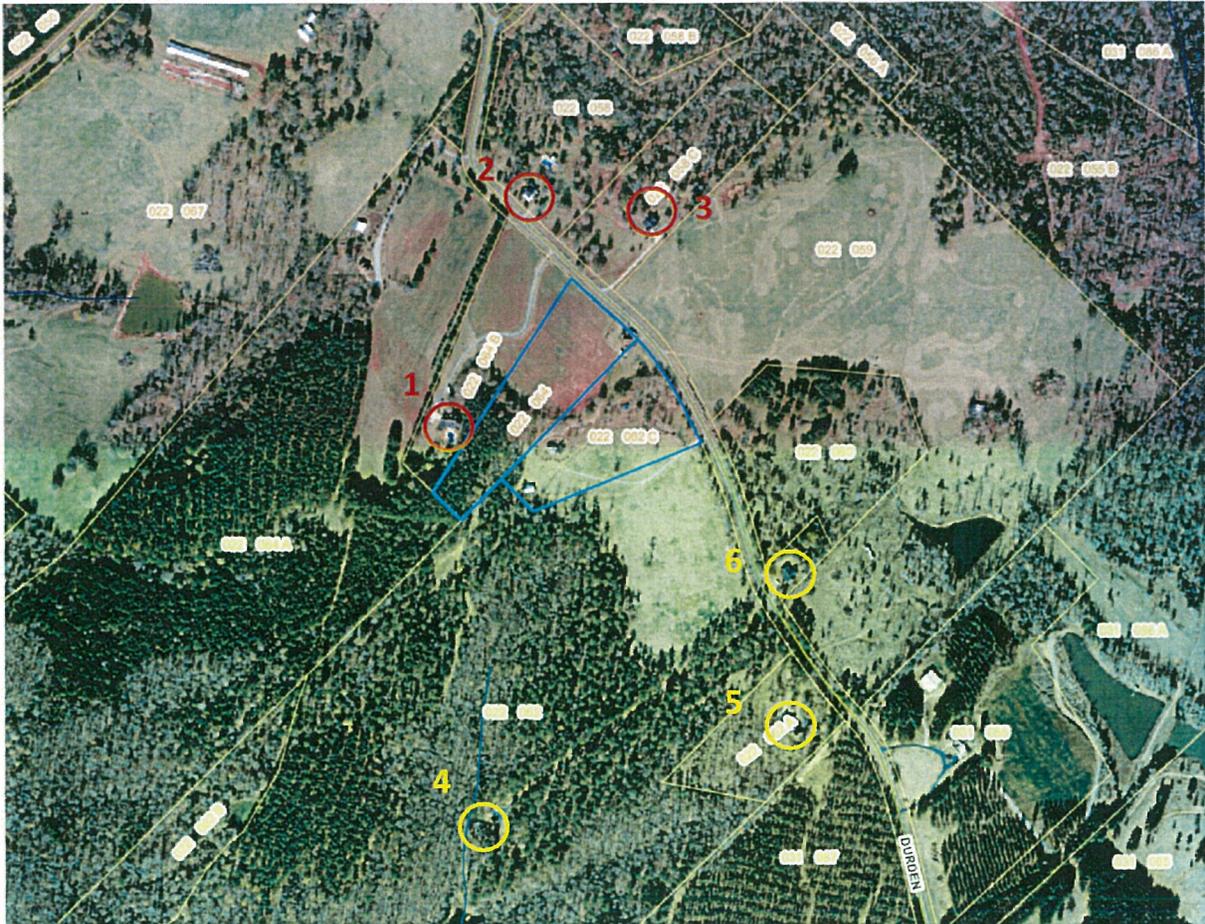
History of prior zoning actions

One prior zoning action has been requested for this property, combined with adjacent properties. Mr. Holt requested a conditional use to operate an Event Facility in 2012. This application was in response to ordinance changes that created the definition and regulations for an Event Facility. As public events on private property were prohibited prior to the approval of the 2012 ordinance, the annual Sunflower Farm Festival could not be a grandfathered use. The Planning Commission made a recommendation to approve the application with conditions. The Board of Commissioners voted to approve the application with conditions. See attached excerpts from the February 23, 2012 Planning Commission meeting and the March 6, 2012 Board of Commissioners meeting.

Requirements for a Farmstay

The definition and regulations for a Farmstay were added to the Morgan County Zoning Ordinance in February 2012. This is the first application for a Farmstay.

A Farmstay is similar to a bed and breakfast in that it allows lodging in a private residence, but it adds an educational component that is not required for a bed and breakfast. In addition to identifying a minimum acreage, maximum guest rooms and number of guests, a Farmstay application must provide an educational program outline that identifies the learning opportunities available to guests. See the attached copy of *Chapter 7.33 Farmstays*. The applicant's support documents also address each point of the ordinance's requirements.



An aerial showing the location of surrounding residences. Number 4 is the applicant. Numbers 1 and 5 are the applicant's family. Number 2 is 375 feet from the closest property line of the subject properties. Number 3 is 350 feet from the closest property line. Number 6 is 620 feet from the closest property line.

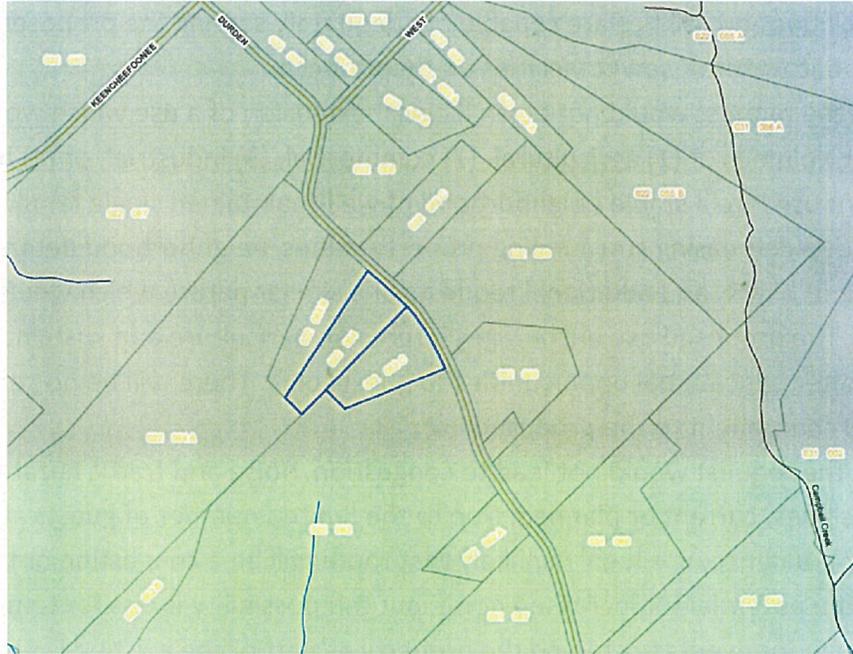
Comprehensive Plan and Future Land Use Map

From Chapter 3 of the Morgan County Comprehensive Plan:

Goal 1.0: Permanently preserve open space and green space throughout Morgan County in order to maintain a sense of rural character, provide passive recreational opportunities, preserve environmental quality, and encourage farming, livestock raising, dairying, forestry, and other agricultural activities that are environmentally compatible.

Objective 4.0: Support the continued existence of a viable agricultural and forestry sector in the county.

Objective 5.0: Support efforts and adopt regulations that help to retain and attract low intensity, land extensive activities, e.g., commercial hunting operations, horseback-riding resorts, and other agri-tourism, heritage tourism, and ecotourism.



The Future Land Use map shows the subject parcels, as well as the surrounding area, as Agricultural/Forestry/Estate Residential. (The blue on the right was a copier/toner error; please excuse.)

Criteria for Consideration

(Please note that the criteria below are bulleted in the Morgan County Zoning Ordinance. They are numbered here for ease of use. Staff comments are written in blue.

1. Adequate provision is made by the applicant to reduce any adverse environmental impacts of the proposed use to an acceptable level. *The proposed use contains an educational component that encourages reduction of negative environmental impacts through sustainable farming. There is the potential for litter, but the possibility is less for temporary lodging than for events hosted on the property as part of the existing Event Facility.*
2. Vehicular traffic and pedestrian movement on adjacent streets will not be substantially hindered or endangered. *Vehicular traffic will increase slightly, depending on the number of guests and duration of stay. The possibility for traffic issues is less for temporary lodging than for events hosted on the property as part of the existing Event Facility.*
3. Off-street parking and loading, and the entrance to and exit from such parking and loading, will be adequate in terms of location, amount and design to service the use. *All proposed parking will be off-street. The entrance is used with the event facility and no problems or complaints have been reported.*

4. Public facilities and utilities are capable of adequately serving the proposed use. [There are no public water or sewer facilities on the property.](#)
5. Granting the request would not be an illogical extension of a use which would introduce damaging volumes of (1) agricultural, (2) commercial, (3) industrial, or (4) high density apartment use into a stable neighborhood of well-maintained single family homes, and likely lead to decreasing surrounding property values, neighborhood deterioration, spreading of blight, and additional requests of a similar nature which would expand the problem. [The proposed use encourages interest in agriculture and sustainable farming, and will offer educational opportunities to guests only. There will be no commercial or industrial component to the proposed use.](#)
6. Granting the request would not lead to congestion, noise and traffic hazards or overload public facilities, current or planned. [Due to the limited number of guests allowed by the Farmstay ordinance, it is highly unlikely that there will be a congestion or traffic issue. There is the potential for increased noise, but the possibility is less for temporary lodging than for events hosted on the property as part of the existing Event Facility.](#)
7. Granting the request would conform to the general expectation for the area population growth and distribution according to the Comprehensive Land Use Plan. [The Future Land Use Map shows the area as remaining agricultural. The proposed use allows income for a family farm that provides for the retention of the farm and, therefore, encourages agriculture.](#)
8. Granting the request would not lead to a major negative change in existing (1) levels of public service, (2) government employees or (3) fiscal stability. [Due to the transitory nature of the primary occupants, there is the potential for an increase in law enforcement and fire calls and responses.](#)
9. Granting the request would not have a “domino effect,” in that it becomes the opening wedge for further rapid growth, urbanization or other land-use change beyond what is indicated in the Comprehensive Land Use Plan. [The Comprehensive Plan encourages agricultural-related businesses, including agri-tourism.](#)

Staff Comments

The applicant has provided documentation that meets the requirements of the Farmstay ordinance for education. The buildings will require an inspection by the Morgan County Building Official to determine if any modifications are necessary related to public health and safety.

Based on the above comments, Staff suggests the following recommendation:

Recommendation to the Board of Commissioners to recommend approval of the conditional use application with the conditions that the owner inform guests of the county noise ordinance and that the property pass a health and safety inspection prior to operation.

1891 Freeman House

Greenhouse & Gardens

Durden Road

Flower Field

Sunflower Farm

Heg House

1811 Cottages

Enchanted Forest

Tractor Shed

SUNFLOWER FARM INC.

404-433-5646
wesholtga@icloud.com

1430 Durden Rd.
Rutledge, GA
30663

February 5, 2015

Morgan County Planning & Development
150 E. Washington St.
Madison, GA 30650

Dear Morgan County Board of Commissioners,

Sunflower Farm has been a thriving cut flower farm and event facility in Morgan County for more than thirteen years. Our family operation has gone through some big changes in the last couple of years, as we have decided to no longer host our very popular Sunflower Farm Festival. We continue to do outdoor weddings and other events, as well as growing our cut flowers and other produce.

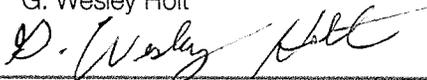
Through the years we have been asked by guests of the farm about staying overnight, to enjoy and learn about our daily activities here. Now that we have a little more time on our hands we think operating a Farmstay at Sunflower Farm will be a perfect fit for expanding on what we offer to our visitors. The 1811 House which until recently was used as a family residence, office, and as part of our event facility, will become two separate lodging units. Attached by a covered breezeway, each very nicely appointed cottage will accommodate up to four guests overnight. We have included drawings and photos of the buildings.

I have over fifteen years experience working in Agritourism and educational programing here in Georgia. I also managed a successful farm with a Bed & Breakfast here in Morgan County for ten of those years. Sunflower Farm will be a place that will appeal to a wide variety of travelers coming to our area to experience our rural way of life. Guests will learn about planting their own sunflowers and wildflowers, starting their own backyard flock of laying hens, and exploring the 200 plus year history of the 1811 McCowan House . Our Sunflower Farmstay will only enhance our farm, our neighborhood, and all of Morgan County. That is why I ask you to please approve our request for a Conditional Use. Thank you!

Sunflower Farm

Sincerely yours,

G. Wesley Holt



Sunflower Farmstay: Tours and Activities

History Tour of Sunflower Farm: 1-1.5 Hour Tour- Ages 5 and older.

Guests will learn about the different people that have lived and worked the land here on Sunflower Farm, along with their farming practices and lifestyles; from the Creek-Native Americans, to the present-day owners. The walking tour will include the use of artifacts and antiquities found on the farm and will feature the history of the 1811 McCowan House and the 1891 Freeman House.

Rare & Native Plants, Some of our Favorites: 1-1.5 Hour Tour-Ages 12 and older.

This is a guided tour of our gardens and woodlands and will be targeted to guests that want to learn about rare, native, and heirloom plant species. From our old fashioned "Pass Along" flowers and vegetables, to the native Azaleas that thrive in our woods. The farm will share our seeds and cuttings when available.

Farm Hay Ride Tour: 1/2 Hour Tour- All ages.

Enjoy a family tour of Sunflower Farm from our Hay Ride Wagon, pulled by our John Deere tractor.

**a sign will be posted on the wagon stating safety rules, which the tour leader will go over before it begins.

- > Stay Seated Inside Wagon While Tractor Is Running!
- > Keep Arms and Legs Inside Wagon While Moving!
- > Children Under 16 Must Be Accompanied By an Adult!

Great Egg-spectations!: 1Hour Tour- All Ages.

This tour of our hen house and egg processing operation focuses on how the structure was saved and moved from its original farm site. Guests learn about the different varieties of hens and the eggs they lay. Overnight guests will be able to help us collect eggs during their stay on the farm. We will demonstrate how we clean and candle the eggs before we sell them. We will also talk about how we use the chicken "litter" for fertilizer for our gardens. This is a great activity if you are thinking about starting your own backyard flock!

** Hand sanitizer is made available to reduce risk of illness from touching surfaces in and around the hen house. ** Guests are not allowed to handle hens.

Nature Hikes and Woods Play for Kids: Unlimited, Kids of all ages, 1 to 91!

Go for a hike through our Enchanted Forest where you will find fun things for all ages. There are traditional old-time games like a See-Saw, Leap Frog, and kid sized Camp Site with tent. Interpretive signs point out natural features while the kids use their imaginations and play like their grandparents did many years ago.

**Parents will be required to monitor children. Area will be treated during tick season and Insect Repellant will be available for guests

Getting Buzzed! The Birds (Hummers) & Bees: 1 Hour Tour: All Ages; May-October.

Humming Birds and Bees are very important to us as pollinators. See one of the most heavily populated Humming Bird gardens in the state, and learn our tricks to attracting so many. We will show you different varieties of plants for your own garden that bring in the hummers. We will also talk about the honey bee that is so important to our agricultural industry.

Sunflowers. Growing Your Own: 1 Hour: All Ages; April-October

We have been growing sunflowers here on the farm since the 1980's. These are some of the largest and most popular blooming flowers in the world. We will show you how we grow them in the field and in our gardens. Guests learn about the many different varieties and can even plant their own to take home with them. Guests will be able to help us plant seed, with weed control and with care of the flowers.

** Hand tools used will only be given to adults .

How Do You Grow Wildflowers and Poppies?: 1 Hour: All Ages; October-June.

Learn the tricks to spreading your own wildflower seed for a beautiful patch of mixed reseeding annuals. Poppies predominate our patches in May, and in early June the Blue Corn Flower takes the stage. Many other brightly blooming varieties are discussed as well.

Below you will find the requirements for a Farmstay.

Sunflower Farm has answered below each in red.

Chapter 7.33 Farmstays

The property proposed for a Farmstay is at least 5 acres or greater in size.

The Sunflower Farmstay will be on 12.5 acres and is adjacent to our family farm of 135 acres all zoned AG.

No more than five guest rooms shall be allowed.

Accommodations for no more than fifteen total guests shall be allowed.

There will be two guest cottages, each having just one bedroom and one bathroom. There will be an additional full bed in the sleeping loft of the MCCowan Cottage, and a pull out sofa in the living area of the Kitchen Cottage. This will allow for up to four overnight guests in each unit and eight total for the Farmstay.

Food shall be served only to registered guests, and the price of meals shall be included in the price of the overnight accommodations.

Sunflower Farm will not prepare any cooked meals for guests. Each cottage has refrigeration and appliances for cooking, so guests will have an assortment of fresh packaged breakfast and snack items to choose from and will prepare these themselves. The grocery items will be included in the room pricing. Guests will be referred to local restaurants, and will be encouraged to buy locally produced food from neighboring farms to prepare their own FARMeander meals.

Lodging and meals shall be incidental and not the primary function of the Farmstay establishment. Must meet the requirements of the Morgan County Health Department, if applicable.

The Farmstay will be an extra source of income from the farm for our family. Sunflower Farm will continue to operate our cut flower and other produce operation, along with our Farm Event Facility.

Must provide an educational program outline which includes the following, at a minimum:

- Why the particular location is suited to be used for agricultural education and how the establishment will promote agricultural education;

Sunflower Farm is a great location for this type of business, as it is nicely situated in the middle of Morgan County's rural agricultural community, and is surrounded by other

farms that have been in the same family for nearly 80 years. The West and Holt family have been raising many different crops on this land over the many decades. Our history along with that of the early agrarian settlers of our area, will be shared with our guests. Sunflower Farm is well known for it's beautiful, seasonal cut flowers. We will share our knowledge of how we grow these flowers and about the pollinators that keep them reproducing. We will also provide education and information on rare and native plant species, as well as backyard flock egg production.

- A description of each activity, including proposed equipment to be used, any possible risks and how such risks will be minimized;

*Descriptions of the different tours and activities are attached.

- A description of any possible adverse impacts to neighboring properties and how such impacts will be minimized;

Sunflower Farm does not foresee there being any adverse impact to the neighboring properties. Note that adjacent property on either side of the farm are owned by family members, and that the owner of Sunflower Farm lives just next door to the cottages and will be readily available throughout the guests stay.

- A minimum of five educational activities that will be available to guests as soon as the facility opens; •A map or drawing of the farm, identifying structures and land features that will be used during educational activities.

* The Tours and Activities and a map of the farm are attached.

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No motorized off road vehicles shall be used for recreational purposes, but may be used as a part of normal farming functions.

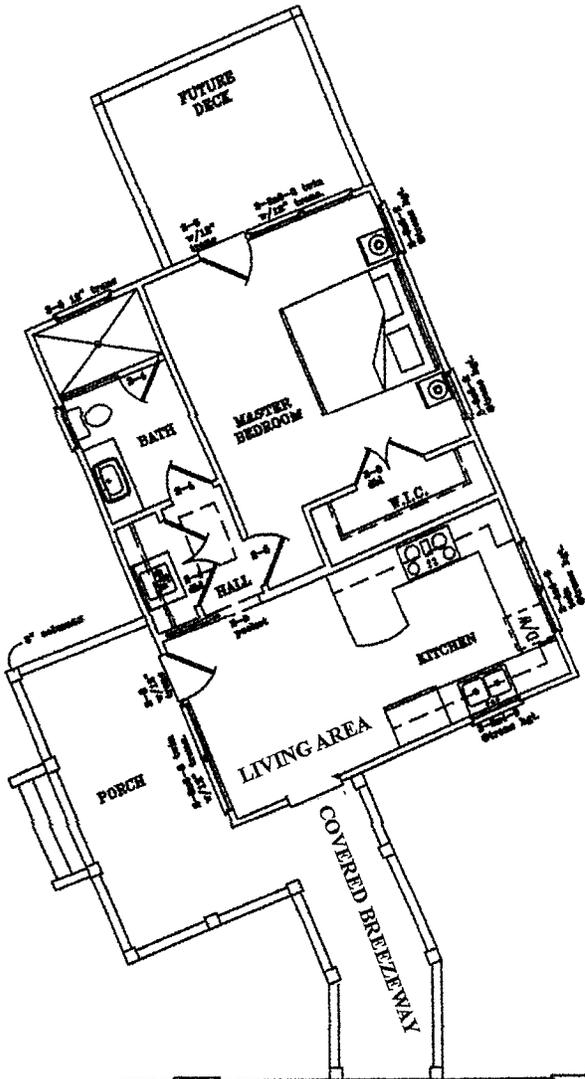
Sunflower Farm will not allow guests to use any motorized off-road vehicles during their stay on the farm.

Parking for Farmstay establishments must be contained on the property and cannot be on the street.

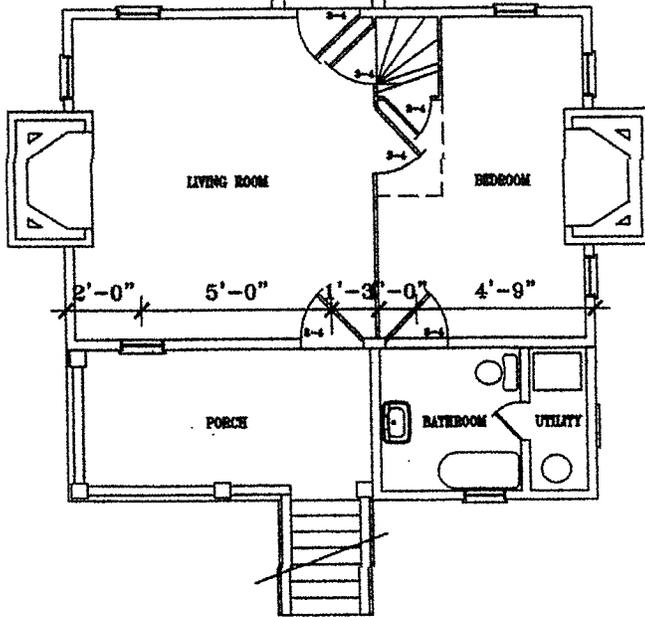
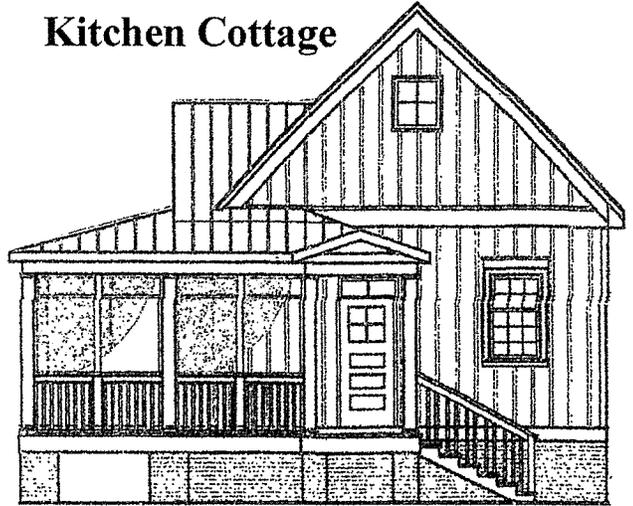
Sunflower Farm has more than enough crushed stone surface parking for the two cottages and ample parking on turf for events of 250 or more people.

Farmstays must obtain a yearly Occupational Tax Certificate, which will require a safety code compliance inspection prior to issuance.

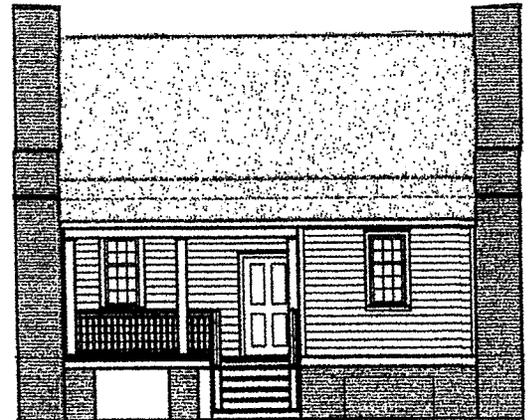
Sunflower Farm currently has an Occupational Tax Certificate for an Event Facility.



Kitchen Cottage



McCowan Cottage



Front Elevation
1/8" = 1'-0"

Overall Floor Plan
1/8" = 1'-0"

Woodward Ryfun
ARCHITECTS, INC.

1515 HENDON ROAD
WOODBRIDGE, GEORGIA 30096
TEL. 770.971.1212
FAX. 770.971.1212

The 1811 House
for
Wes Hol
1380 Durden Road
Rutledge, GA 30666

Chapter 7.33 Farmstays

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Must meet the requirements of the Morgan County Health Department, if applicable.

Must provide an educational program outline which includes the following, at a minimum:

- Why the particular location is suited to be used for agricultural education and how the establishment will promote agricultural education;
- A description of each activity, including proposed equipment to be used, any possible risks and how such risks will be minimized;
- A description of any possible adverse impacts to neighboring properties and how such impacts will be minimized;
- A minimum of five educational activities that will be available to guests as soon as the facility opens;
- A map or drawing of the farm, identifying structures and land features that will be used during educational activities.

No motorized off road vehicles shall be used for recreational purposes, but may be used as a part of normal farming functions.

Parking for Farmstay establishments must be contained on the property and cannot be on the street.

Farmstays must obtain a yearly Occupational Tax Certificate, which will require a safety code compliance inspection prior to issuance.

EXCERPT FROM PLANNING COMMISSION MINUTES FEBRUARY 23, 2012

- I. A petition has been received from Sunflower Farm for a Conditional Use permit to operate an Event Facility at 1430 Durden Road, Rutledge, Georgia.

Ms. Craft recused herself and left the room.

Chuck Jarrell presented the staff report on behalf of Morgan County. He explained that after the approval of the Event Facility ordinance in October 2011, all facilities currently operating events must comply with the ordinance. Sunflower Farm hosts small events throughout the year, including weddings and family reunions. Once a year, they also host the county's largest event, the Sunflower Farm Festival, with over 9,000 in attendance. Ordinance-specific concerns were addressed, including structures used, security and emergency staff, restroom availability, and parking. The Planning Commission asked Staff about parking, specifically parking on Durden Road and the accessibility for emergency vehicles. Staff responded that parking on Durden Road was a concern and that the county ordinances did not allow parking on the right-of-way. Also discussed was the process for addressing weather concerns.

Wes Holt, 1430 Durden Road, Rutledge, Georgia, spoke in favor of the application. He explained that the shoulder of Durden Road had been staked for the last two years and the parking problem had been eliminated.

No one spoke in opposition of the application.

Motion: Mr. McCarthy made a motion to recommend approval of the Conditional Use request, with the condition that parking on Durden Road be prohibited.

Second: Mr. Joiner

Vote: 5:0 The motion to recommend approval of the Conditional Use request, with condition, was approved. Mr. Tonge abstained from the vote.

EXCERPT FROM BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS MINUTES MARCH 6, 2012

1. Petition from Sunflower Farm for a Conditional Use permit to operate an event facility at 1430 Durden Road, Rutledge, Georgia.

Tara Cooner, Senior Planner, stated that Wes Holt, on behalf of Sunflower Farm, is seeking a Conditional Use permit to operate an Event Facility at 1430 Durden Road. With the adoption of the event facility ordinance in October of 2011, all facilities currently operating events must comply with the ordinance.

Sunflower Farm hosts several small events throughout the year, such as weddings and family reunions. Once a year they host the Sunflower Farm Festival, which attracts over 9,000 attendees in a 3 day period. Ordinance-specific concerns addressed included -